

INCREASE Corona Workshop Series: Workshop No.3

Risk Communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran and Germany

23 May 2022 – 11:00 time Berlin – 13:30 time Tehran (online)

Registration link: <https://fu-berlin.webex.com/fu-berlin-en/j.php?RGID=rf29b46c40a63b9cdee8116359d6ba167>

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, declared by the WHO on 11 March 2020, countries have reacted differently depending on their context-specific capacities and realities. Differences in development and socio-demographic indicators such as poverty and access to healthcare seem to have played a relevant role in the progress of the SARS-CoV-2 virus within different population groups. Perhaps for that reason, the idea of considering COVID-19 from a ‘syndemic’¹ perspective is gaining momentum. Beyond that, the pandemic has also triggered unprecedented international efforts and scientific collaboration in developing an effective vaccine against the virus, with some remarkable achievements but also some questionings have raised (see for example the concerns around the AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe and the USA). Today, one of the main challenges for governments in the coming months (or years) will be to provide effective communication about the benefits (as well as risks) of vaccination against the SARS-CoV-2 virus as well as all public policies related to the pandemic. Dismantling misleading information regarding to COVID-19 vaccines and measures with coherent messages between politicians, public health authorities and scientists will increase trust and confidence among population, which is fundamental to mobilise the wider level of public support needed to adopt measures effectively.

In addition to previous and ongoing debates, which mainly go around procurement and, in some cases, also around vaccine safety, we have observed that achieving high vaccination rates will be one of the main societal challenges for the foreseeable future. Another relevant aspect for risk communication is the effectiveness of preventing measures against COVID-19. In the third workshop, we expect to address the topic of risk communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, including vaccination, as well as the challenges (from a societal point of view) in achieving the goals of preventive measures and vaccination campaigns: social trust, types of communication strategies, communication needs and objectives, misinformation, and the like. While countries like Germany, Iran, and others are progressing to herd immunity, hesitancy and rejection to COVID-19 vaccines and preventive measures are gaining more attention, and sometimes creating concerns among health authorities. For example, if certain (relatively large) groups of population are not vaccinated, this may compromise country’s campaigns and wipe out costly efforts made against the pandemic.

Likewise, the ongoing pandemic reminds us that international cooperation is fundamental for disaster and crisis management. The COVID-19 crisis brings to light how far away we are from an effective international or even global cooperation for mutual help beyond all varying beliefs, political differences, economic or personal interests. The asymmetrical distribution of vaccines provides the most obvious

¹ The term ‘syndemic’ emphasises the resulting synergical interplay between biological, social, cultural, environmental, and political factors in the health of individuals and populations (Fronteira et al., 2021).

example. Such an international cooperation is hardly possible on an ad hoc basis but needs long-term commitment, respectful communication and efficiently working infrastructures.

In this regard, the third workshop seeks to meet experts from Germany and Iran to share experiences and discuss approaches around risk communication as well as experiences in both countries. The workshop aims to create a network of experts that can dialogue around ongoing pandemic developments and be a space of learning and discussion to overcome mentioned challenges.

Some of the introductory questions for this first workshop are:

- How to design and implement effective risk communication strategies that enable community engagement?
- What strategies have been employed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? Are there lessons to learn?
- COVID-19 misinformation and ‘infodemic’ management. What are the current challenges and how to overcome them?
- What other social phenomena may risk the effectiveness of risk communication?
- Others

Program

- Introduction
 - Welcome and introduction of the speakers
 - Rules/organisational
- Speakers’ presentations (15 to 20 min each)
 - Dr. Annett Schulze
 - Dr. Atefeh Vaezi
- Discussant: Dr Farnaz Arefian
- Question & Answers (Q&A).
- Closing

Speakers

Atefeh Vaezi

Dr. Atefeh Vaezi is Assistant Professor in Community Medicine at the Isfahan University of Medical Sciences in Iran. (*More information soon*)

Annett Schulze

Dr. Schulze is Deputy Head of the Crisis Prevention and Coordination Unit, Department Risk Communication, at the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). She is an expert in several fields of media and risk communication and part of the BfR pandemic research activities. The BfR is the scientific agency of the Federal Republic of Germany and its work is particularly dedicated to public communication about technological and behavioural aspects of health risks, consumer safety, crisis coordination and inter/national expert networking.

Dr. Farnaz Arefian (Discussant)

Dr. Arefian is an expert in disaster management and risk reduction (DRR), urban design and strategic management. She has a background in private sector consultancy and management for delivering large-scale urban development and architectural projects, including participatory post disaster reconstruction. She has first-hand experience in post disaster reconstruction in the city of Bam, Iran, after the disastrous earthquake in 2003. Her PhD research dealt with organisational design and management for post disaster reconstruction programmes. Her current research interests concern disaster risk reduction; urban reconstruction; urban resilience; strategic management and organisational configuration for urban development programmes; and contextual urban challenges in the Middle East and Central Asian cities.

References

Fronteira, I., Sidat, M., Magalhães, J.P., de Barros, F.P.C., Delgado, A.P., Correia, T., Daniel-Ribeiro, C.T., & Ferrinho, P. (2021). The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic: A syndemic perspective. *One Health*, 12, 100228.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.onehlt.2021.100228>